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ABSTRACT

This article is the final report on a study of adolescent girls which explored the relationship between physical activity and self-esteem. Two earlier phases of the study collected data on girls aged 9 to 12 years (n=76) and aged 12 to 17 years (n=67). A questionnaire explored: (1) confidence and perceived competence; (2) sports and activity level; and (3) career choices and perceived viability of a chosen career. The girls also discussed their views on sports, gym or recess, confidence and risk-taking, and their concerns for the future. Results indicated: (1) younger girls had a clearer vision of future occupations; (2) the majority of girls felt their career aspirations were possible; (3) younger girls were more specific about future occupations, while older girls spoke more generally about career areas; (4) few girls aspired to careers in sports or athletics; (5) the majority of girls were optimistic about their future and had something to look forward to, such as increased freedom and responsibility; (6) concerns about the future included financial stability, school, their parents' health, and leaving home; (7) most girls pictured themselves getting married in the future, with definite views regarding having children; and (8) older girls worried about school, the future, and failure, while many of the younger girls worried mostly about safety. (RB)

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Adolescent Girls Face the Future

Lynn Jaffee and Suzie Bergeron

Introduction

This article is a final report on a study of adolescent girls and self-esteem that Melpomene has conducted during the past 2-1/2 years. Our primary goal in undertaking the study was to explore the relationship between physical activity and self-esteem in adolescent girls. Reports on those findings were reported in the Autumn 1992 and Autumn 1993 issues of the *Melpomene Journal*.

We became interested in the topic because of research that documents declining self-esteem during adolescence, a drop far more pronounced for girls than for boys. The work of researcher Carol Gilligan and her colleagues describes nine- and 10-year-old girls as self-confident and self-possessed. However, those same girls emerge on the far side of adolescence unsure of themselves and their futures (1, 2).

A study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 1991 also documents an extreme drop in self-esteem among adolescent girls (7). In addition, the AAUW study found that girls tend not to gravitate towards math and science in school, which may have a direct impact on their future.

In light of these findings, we included questions about future careers and aspirations in our study of adolescent girls. Using questionnaires and conversations with study participants, we hoped to gain insight into some of the factors that determine how girls see their future. Our objective was to answer the questions, How do girls envision their future?, What is the impact of self-esteem on girls' future plans, and What is the perceived role of physical activity in girls' futures?

Review of the Literature

Aspirations for the future are an important part of adolescent development.

A 1991 study of gender differences in late adolescents' views of their future was conducted by A. L. Green and Susan M. Wheatley of Pacific Graduate School of Psychology (3). The researchers conducted 90-minute interviews and assessed psychological profile characteristics for 39 young men and 43 young women, whose mean age was 20 years. Psychological profile characteristics ranged from abstract reasoning to self-concept and self-esteem.

After instructing each participant to list all of the events that might happen in their future, the researchers found no differences between the women and men regarding their outlook toward future occupations. Both the men and the women anticipated a comparable number of career-related events.

However, the women tended to anticipate more family-related events than did the men. For example, more than 80% of the female participants and only 36% of the male participants anticipated marriage. Seventy percent of the women looked forward to having children, whereas 31% of the men anticipated this life event.

Gender differences also appeared in the timing of adult events. The female participants anticipated being married and becoming parents at a younger age than did the males. This suggests that the women seemed to think they would have less time to accomplish the same adult transitions as the men.

Dr. Edith Margolin, of California State University, theorizes that during early adolescence girls are confused about their present and future roles in society. Her paper on this topic, "Adolescent women: Where have they been? Where are they going?," was presented at the Western Kentucky University Women's Studies Conference in September 1991 (4).

Margolin states that when girls look to their parents for guidance, many find their parents, especially mothers, confused about their own value systems, roles and expectations. They therefore are unable to guide their children.

By later adolescence, many girls have become frustrated and angry about their parents' and their own confusion. Margolin concludes that the resulting feelings of helplessness and alienation are caused by a lack of identity being passed down from adults to adolescents.

In order to determine the effects of age, sex, social class and family interaction on adolescents' future outlook, Jari-Erik Nurmi of Helsinki University conducted a study of 73 girls and 75 boys (5). All participants were of Finnish descent and ranged in age from 10 to 19. Social class was determined on the basis of the parents' occupations.

The study consisted of a questionnaire about family life and an interview regarding future hopes and fears. According to the findings, as young people grew older, their perspectives on the future broadened. Girls more than boys tended to aspire to relationships with parents and peers and had more plans regarding a future family. Girls also tended to have more *knowledge* about future hopes than did boys, although girls and boys were evenly matched in relation to hopes regarding future occupations and education.

Participants in the higher social classes were found to look further into the

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future than those from lower social classes. For both girls and boys, social interaction in the family had a significant effect on their orientation toward the future. Nurmi concluded that the support adolescents receive from their families is important for their planning for a future profession.

In another study by Jari-Erik Nurmi and Harry Pulliainen, parent-child interaction, self-esteem and intelligence were examined to determine their effects on adolescents' future orientation (6). All participants, girls and boys aged 10 to 11 and 14 to 15, were students at a secondary school in Finland.

The participants were given a questionnaire inquiring about background information and parent-child interaction, followed by analogy and self-esteem tests. Finally, the students were individually interviewed.

The results indicated that older adolescents reported less parental control and family discussion than the younger ones. Older adolescents also showed higher self-esteem and intelligence. Adolescents who reported a high level of family discussion tended to have more hopes for a future family and marriage than those reporting a lower level of family discussion. The study concluded that even though girls reported more family discussion than boys, their self-esteem was lower.

A 1990 study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) also concluded that adolescent girls have lower levels of self-esteem than do adolescent boys (7). The study, which included 3,000 children nationally, from fourth through 10th grades, explored the relationship between gender and self-esteem, career aspirations and educational experiences, including interest in math and science.

The AAUW study concluded that as girls and boys moved through adolescence, both lost self-esteem; however, girls experienced greater drops in self-esteem than did boys. Also, girls had less interest in math and science than boys and lower perceptions of their abilities in those areas. Those adolescents who were good in math and science tended to gravitate toward professions that make use of those subjects. A further finding was that those students who liked math and science were more likely to strive toward careers as professionals.

Method

Data for this study was collected in two phases. The first phase, conducted in the fall of 1991, involved 76 girls between the ages of nine and 12. The second phase was conducted one year later and involved 67 girls between the ages of 12 and 17.

Data was collected in a focus group format. A research team composed of a grade school educator, experts in questionnaire and focus group design and Melpomene research staff and interns were instrumental in designing the focus group and questionnaire format used in Phase One of this study. With minor modifications, the same questionnaire and focus group format was used in Phase Two.

In both phases, the girls completed a three-page questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire provided a broad measure of self-esteem, confidence and competency. The second section focused on levels of physical activity and sports participation. A third section concentrated on girls' occupational choices and the viability of those choices.

After completing the questionnaire, the girls were engaged in an hour to hour-and-a-half discussion led by research team facilitators. A recorder from the research team was assigned to take notes on the group discussion. All focus groups except one agreed to having their discussions audiotaped. The girls discussed their views on sports, gym, confidence and risk-taking and shared their concerns about the future.

Tapes and notes from the focus groups were transcribed and coded on the basis of recurring themes, such as sports, confidence, risk-taking, personal worries and thoughts and concerns about growing up. The quotations that appear in this report were taken directly from the transcribed tapes of focus group discussions.

Description of the Sample

Seven focus groups were conducted with younger girls, aged nine to 12, and 10 focus groups were conducted with older girls from 12 to 17 years old. Focus groups were arranged in collaboration with public and private schools and a variety of organizations, including the Girl Scouts, YWCA, community centers and the Minneapolis Park Board.

Each group consisted of three to 16 girls, for a total of 76 younger and 67 older girls. The girls were from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, with the exception of one group, which was conducted in rural Minnesota.

Attention was given to gathering a group of girls who were economically and racially diverse. Sixty-three percent of the younger girls and 54% of the older girls were Caucasian; 24% of the younger and 30% of the older girls were African American; 4% of the younger and 12% of the older girls were Asian; 9% of the younger girls were of mixed descent; 2% of the older girls were Chicana/Latina; and 2% were Native American.

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Results and Discussion

Career Aspirations

When asked "What do you really want to be when you grow up?" the younger girls had a clearer picture than the older girls of what they wanted to be (see Table 1).

The most common occupations for younger girls were doctor or health care professional (30.2%), teacher (23.7%) and veterinarian or someone who works with animals (13.2%).

Table 1

Girls' responses to the question "What do you really want to be when you grow up?"

	Younger		Older	
Occupation	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Doctor or Health Care Professional	23	30.2	9	13.4
Teacher	18	23.7	6	9.0
Work with animals/ Veterinarian	10	13.2	4	6.0
Performer	9	11.8	6	9.0
Scientist/Engineer	9	11.8	4	6.0
Professional or Olympic Athlete	6	7.9	5	7.5
Artist/Writer	6	7.9	5	7.5
Mother	4	5.3	1	1.5
Model/ Fashion Designer	3	3.9	—	—
Philanthropist	3	3.9	—	—
First Female President	2	2.6	—	—
Pilot	2	2.6	—	—
Psychologist	—	—	4	6.0
Counselor/ Social Worker	—	—	2	3.0
Astronaut/NASA	—	—	3	4.5
Archeologist	—	—	2	3.0
Work with children	—	—	2	3.0
Don't know	6	7.9	14	20.9
Other	4	5.3	8	12.0

For the older girls, the most common response was "I don't know" (20.9%), followed by doctor or health care professional (13.4%), and "other" (12%). Responses that were coded as "other" included *occupations*, such as accountant, police officer or wife, as well as descriptions of the *kind* of job they would like, such as something interesting, challenging or that pays well.

The fact that the older girls were less clear about their future occupations might be attributed to their decreased self-esteem and confidence about what the future held for them. A further explanation might be that as the girls got older they became more aware of the difficulties of realizing their goals. For example, one girl said, "You got a feeling inside, 'I'm gonna make it, I'm gonna be a lawyer, or I'm gonna be a doctor' but it might not happen, so you kind of worry about that. Is it really gonna happen? Can you make it through all those years?"

When the girls were asked if they felt it was possible to do or be what they really wanted when they grew up, the majority of both older and younger girls responded positively. Eighty-three percent of the younger girls and 77% of the older girls felt they could be what they wanted. Only two girls in the younger group and two girls in the older group said they felt their career aspirations were not possible.

The girls in both groups were also asked why they would or would not be able to achieve their career plans (see Table 2). The most common positive responses from the younger girls were:

1. "I like to do it or have an interest" (23.6%);
2. "I believe in myself" (22.4%);
3. "I work hard and get good grades" (15.8%) and "I already know something about that occupation" (15.8%).

In contrast, the most common responses from the older girls were:

1. Question left blank (20.9%) and "I work hard and get good grades" (20.9%);
2. "I'm good at it or have the ability to do it" (17.9%);
3. "I like to do it" or "I have an interest" (16.4%).

The fact that one-fifth of the older girls left this question blank further supports the conclusion that they had a sense of uncertainty about their futures.

Table 3 illustrates negative responses to the question "Why would or wouldn't your future career plans be possible?" Expressing doubt about the future, 20.9% of the older girls said that they might change their mind.

While outwardly optimistic about their career plans, the older girls' comments in focus group discussions revealed

Table 2

Positive responses to the question "Why would or wouldn't your future career plans be possible?"

	Younger		Older	
Reason	**#**	**%**	**#**	**%**
Like to do it/ interest	18	23.6	11	16.4
Believe in self	17	22.4	8	11.9
Work hard/grades	12	15.8	14	20.9
Already do it/ knowledge	12	15.8	7	10.4
Good at it/ability	10	13.2	12	17.9
Really want to	6	7.9	—	—
Other positive	6	7.9	6	9.0
Opportunity/ connection	1	1.3	—	—
Fun	—	—	6	9.0
Potential	—	—	2	3.0
Don't know	—	—	1	1.5
Left blank	9	11.8	14	20.9

Table 3

Negative responses to the question "Why would or wouldn't your future career plans be possible?"

	Younger		Older	
Response	#	%	#	%
Not sure it's possible	4	5.3	—	—
Will be hard	2	2.6	—	—
Travel/relocation	1	1.3	—	—
Flunk/not succeed	1	1.3	—	—
Might change mind	—	—	14	20.9
Don't know	—	—	3	4.5
Don't have ability	—	—	1	1.5
Doubt creative motivation	—	—	1	1.5
Not many girls are pro. athletes	—	—	1	1.5
Left blank	9	11.8	14	20.9

their uncertainty about the future. The majority of younger girls talked about specific occupations they wanted to hold, such as lawyer, fashion designer or veterinarian. However, many older girls spoke in a more uncertain way about their future aspirations. Some had identified a field of interest but did not know what they would be within that field. For example, one older girl said, "I just want to be kind of a medical something, like maybe a medical assistant or something." Another older girl said, "I wanted for a long time to be an astronaut or fly planes or something to do with the air; space and aviation."

Some of the older girls had specific vocations in mind, but many spoke about job aspirations in general terms. They seemed to know about the qualities their future career would have but not necessarily what that job would be. For example, one girl said, "I feel like I'd want to do something with whatever talent that I have, something to help the world or whatever." Another girl simply said, "I want to be successful."

Much of the older girls' uncertainty about the future can be attributed to decreased self-esteem and a questioning of their abilities. However, it's also true that many girls may find themselves redefining their future plans when faced with reality and when they've developed a clearer picture of what the future might hold. For example, the few younger girls who talked about going to college voiced an uncertainty about being away from home and where they would go. In contrast, the older girls spoke about college more frequently; their concerns were about the cost, who would pay for it and the difficulty of succeeding in college.

Sports Careers

Despite the fact that most of the girls in both groups were physically active (100% of the younger girls and 82% of the older girls), few of the girls in either group aspired to careers in athletics. Only 7.9% of the younger girls (n=6) and 7.5% of the older girls (n=5) said they wanted to have a sports career when they grew up.

The only sports careers the girls mentioned on the questionnaire were either Olympic or professional athletes. This limited view of career options in athletics could be attributed to a lack of role models, because women working in this field are not readily visible.

A second reason that the girls had not chosen sports careers might be due to a perceived lack of opportunity in that field. For example, one younger girl said, "When you get older, since there's not a lot of opportunities for sports, you can't earn a lot of money, so you have to get a job, and when you get a job there's not really time for any sports."

The girls who saw sports as a part of their future assumed their participation would diminish when they are adults. Some thought they would not have the time for sports. For example, one girl said, "You're not going to be able to go to your job, change clothes for about five minutes and then do a quick two-minute run."

Other girls simply saw the intensity of their participation changing. One girl described sports in her future this way: "I'm not going to play sports professionally or anything, but I'd like to play soccer in college if I could, and I think that would be a lot of fun. I don't know what I'd be like when I'm an adult. I guess I'd probably not play soccer anymore or run track or whatever. I'd probably end up just jogging every morning like most adults do or whatever, just to keep in shape."

Future Concerns

Both younger and older girls spoke about money concerns in the future: whether they would have enough or earn enough when they were grown up. One older girl said, "I want to be rich, and I want to have a nice house and all that stuff, but I don't think I will. It just seems too hard. It seems hard enough now, and in the future, I don't know, but I don't want to be poor."

Some girls talked about their confusion about handling money. For example, one older girl said, "When it comes to having money I don't want to be the adult, because it just seems so confusing, like when your parents talk about how to balance checkbooks and stuff." A younger girl said, "I'm kind of worried if I'm going to be able to take care of myself, like taxwise and all that junk."

Despite their concerns, the majority of the girls were generally optimistic about their future, both short-term and long-term. Table 4 depicts both younger and older girls' responses to the statement "I have something to look forward to: this

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month; this year; and in the future." More than 75% of the girls, both younger and older, agreed with those statements, saying they were either "always true" or "sort of true." In contrast, only a very few girls said that those statements were "sort of false" or "always false."

In the focus groups, the younger girls were asked about their vision of the coming year and of becoming teenagers. In this context, many girls spoke about anticipating the next few years because they would gain more freedom. For example, some girls were looking forward to being able to drive, to going out unaccompanied by parents or to staying out later.

Many girls also recognized that the additional freedom would bring added responsibilities. For example, one girl said, "I think it will be cool because you'll get to drive and then you could be helpful to your parents." Another girl said, "I'm excited about being a teenager. My sister is 14 and she always talks to me; she tells me everything and I like that a lot. My mom won't let me start babysitting until I'm 13; I'm excited about that, so I can get a job and have some money."

Some younger girls voiced their concerns about the next few years by saying that they felt that school would be harder. They worried that they would have more homework, the work would get harder or they might have to move to another school and/or be separated from friends. About school, one girl said, "I'm afraid I'll forget assignments when they're due." Another said, "I'm nervous I won't be in the same class as my friends. I'm also embarrassed to say I don't understand." One girl felt that school would be "hard, because you have to get good grades in high school to help you go to college."

This question was not asked of the older girls, because they were already in their teenage years. However, the older girls were asked about the freedoms they have as teenagers. When they talked about freedom, they also spoke of hidden responsibilities, such as having a curfew, driving and being able to go out unaccompanied by a parent. For example, one girl said, "I do what I want just as long as my parents know. If my parents know what I'm doing, then they don't care." Another said, "You can do what you want, but there's a lot of things you have to be responsible for."

Table 4

Responses to the statement "I have something to look forward to"

This month

	Younger		Older	
	#	%	#	%
Always true	44	57.9	43	64.2
Sort of true	13	17.1	20	29.9
Sometimes t/f	9	11.8	2	3.0
Sort of false	1	1.3	1	1.5
Always false	3	3.9	1	1.5

This Year

	Younger		Older	
	#	%	#	%
Always true	56	73.7	44	65.7
Sort of true	10	13.2	15	22.4
Sometimes t/f	2	2.6	4	6.0
Sort of false	1	1.3	2	3.0
Always false	1	1.3	2	3.0

In the Future

	Younger		Older	
	#	%	#	%
Always true	52	68.4	52	77.6
Sort of true	13	17.1	12	17.9
Sometimes t/f	4	5.3	2	3.0
Sort of false	1	1.3	1	1.5
Always false	1	1.3	0	—

It was evident from the transcripts that some girls had much greater freedom and more responsibility than others of about the same age. For example, in one focus group, a girl said, "I can do things locally; I can go places and my parents don't care just as long as they know how I'm getting there and how I'm getting back and where I'm going and stuff like that." But another girl in the same focus group said, "If I want to go to the store or something they [her parents] won't let me go. I know I'd be fine in stores by myself, but I can't."

In a focus group of high school girls talking about taking risks, one girl said, "I think I take a lot of risks. I'm taking a class now and I kind of got in over my head and it was a pretty big risk." For another girl in the same group, living on her own was risky. She said, "Well, I live on my own and I have bills and stuff and I wouldn't do anything like gamble with my money. I just don't see why I'd want to."

Parents

In talking about the future, both the younger and the older girls expressed concern about their parents. Common themes included the worry of leaving parents alone and concern about parents growing old and frail. One younger girl said, " I'm her [mother's] oldest child and she told me that she's scared to let me go." Another said, "I don't want my mother to get old and gray." The older girls spoke more generally, with several saying simply that they worried about their parents. They also worried about other family members, including siblings and grandparents.

While the girls admitted to gaining more freedoms, most of the girls in both phases said that their parents tended to be overprotective. For example, one younger girl said, "Sometimes I feel like my parents are a little overprotective of me, like if I say, 'Can I go swimming with

some friends?' I have to call their mom and see where they're going to be."

The feeling of overprotectiveness on the part of the girls' parents was voiced more often by the older girls, in a variety of ways. For example, one said, "I'm not very much fun, because my parents give me a lot of responsibility but not a lot of freedom." Another said, "One thing parents don't realize is that people are growing up. They still want to treat us like little kids and so they set rules and if you don't obey them they get mad." Other girls said their parents wouldn't let them grow up, were overprotective and made it hard for them to do what they wanted.

Additionally, the older girls (unlike the younger girls) spoke of conflicts with their parents' wishes or expectations for them. It seemed that as the girls got older and were less certain about what they wanted to do in the future, what they *didn't* want to do became more clear. For example, one girl said, "My parents want me to go to college, but I don't want to go. I already made up my mind a long time ago I'm not going to college because I'm not wasting four or more years of my life going to some school." Another older girl said, "The way I was brought up, to totally be the best I can and, you know, like, grow up and be a doctor and make a lot of money and whatever — I don't know if that's exactly what I want to do."

A third girl described a conflict with her father in this way:

Girl: "I've always played the fiddle since I was six, and I'm pretty good at it. I've won a lot of contests and stuff. My dad is really hard on me — he wants me to practice at least an hour a day. With that and sports and everything else, I don't have time."

Interviewer: "That is a lot to do."

Girl: "He always wants me to be in a band. He plays the guitar and wants me to play the fiddle in his band or something, and, I don't know, I don't really want to."

Interviewer: "What do you think will happen?"

Girl: "I don't know. We got in a fight the other night about it, and I kind of quit and told him I didn't want to play anymore, and that's kind of what he lives for — me playing — and so we're still not talking."

Anticipating Adulthood

Younger and older girls differed in what they looked forward to about being grown up. The younger girls talked about deciding things for themselves. For example, in talking about the future, one younger girl said, "I'll get to decide what I want to do with my time and my parents won't be looking over my shoulder. I get to make decisions and I get to decide for myself." Another said, "I can't wait to have my own rules and stuff."

The older girls, however, when speaking about the future, talked about speaking their minds or being listened to. One girl expressed this in the following way: "Well, I want to be [grown up] so I can speak my mind." Another said, "Well, you are acknowledged more when you're grown up." A girl said, "You can talk to whoever you want to in any kind of way." One girl expressed this idea in a negative way by saying, "If there's something going on, people are going to believe the adult before they'll believe the kid."

Several studies on girls during the adolescent years describe a marked loss of self-esteem. The girls' perceptions that they are not heard may be either a cause or an effect of this drop in self-esteem. If girls feel that their opinions don't count or they are not heard, the result may be a loss of confidence to speak their minds.

However, girls with low self-esteem may feel that their opinions are unworthy, and therefore not listened to or simply not spoken. Additionally, researcher Carol Gilligan describes girls who preface their opinions with "I don't know," which is a way for girls to shield themselves from criticism for saying what they think.

Marriage and Family

Most of the girls in both groups envisioned themselves married in their future. However, marriage or motherhood was considered a lifestyle choice rather than a career choice.

Some of the girls expressed concern about marrying the wrong person. For example, a younger girl said, "I think it'd be sort of scary to find a husband because if you don't find the right guy. . . he could be really mean to you." A second younger girl said, "I guess my biggest concern about when I get older is that if I have my husband all picked out and I go and marry this person when I'm young then I'll have to get divorced later."

Many of the older girls spoke about marriage concerns in terms of being dominated by a husband. One girl said, "I want to be more than what women are right now. It's just that I don't want to have to stay in a marriage if I'm not happy, just for his success and stuff." Another voiced her concern by saying, "Your life is gone because your husband takes over."

While many of the girls in this study envisioned themselves married in the future, not all of the girls thought they would have children. In fact, the girls, both younger and older, were very definite in their ideas about whether they would be parents. Some girls were sure that they did not want children. One older girl said, "I don't want to have any kids, no kids, no. I don't want to have kids, because I'll have nieces and nephews and I can get them and get rid of them when I want."

While some of the girls said they did not want children in the future, the majority of the younger and older girls wanted children. An older girl said, "I want to be a mom and that's about it, and

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I want to get married." Another older girl said about her future family, "I want to get married sometime probably and have one little girl. I want to have a girl; I don't want to have a boy; boys are too bad."

A younger girl talked about her future by saying, "If I'm going to be able to pay for [everything], I'm going to probably want to get a pretty good job, because I'm going to get married and have two kids."

Some of the girls who felt they definitely wanted to have children also had given some thought to how they wanted to parent their children. One younger girl said, "I want to have quite a few kids, and I want to spend time with my kids. I think that's really important." An older girl simply said, "I want to be happy and I want my kids to be happy."

Another older girl talked about how she would do things differently than her own parents did. She said, "Basically, I want to be anything my parents aren't because of what they've done. I mean, I haven't been an abused child or anything. But, like, my parents are prejudiced, and I'm not prejudiced, and there's things about them that I absolutely can't stand. I don't like the distrust that exists in my house. I want to be able to trust people, and my parents don't trust me, they don't trust my brother, and they never trusted my sister to begin with, just things like that."

Worries

The older girls had different worries than the younger girls. The older girls worried about school, the future and having enough money in the future, failing and other people's expectations for and opinions about them. For many of the older girls, school and the future were closely related. For example, many girls felt that they had to do well in school in order to get into a good college or get a good job when they were older.

A number of the older girls spoke about not wanting to disappoint themselves or the people close to them. For example, one girl voiced her concern by saying, "I worry about my future school, because I want big things, and I've wanted them for a long time, and my parents are counting on me, and they, like, expect it." Another said, "Failure or doing something bad, not doing it the way I'd like to do it, I don't know, I'm really hard on myself, but I'm not really hard on anybody else. My parents are sort of hard on me, but not as hard as I am on myself."

Some of the older girls were also worried about what other people thought of them. For example, one girl said, "Am I good enough? Will people like me for who I am? Is this going to be a good day, am I going to be made fun of?" Another girl spoke of self-esteem by saying, "I guess I'm kind of confused. Sometimes I worry about what other people think of me and sometimes I worry about if I should be worried about myself, like my self-esteem and my self-image."

In contrast to the worries of the older girls, the younger girls were primarily concerned about being safe. The concerns took two forms. One source of concern was pressure to try drugs or alcohol. One younger girl said, ". . . like drugs and alcohol, not that I'm going to do anything with it, but. . . . I know I can say no, but sometimes its hard to do that." Another girl said that she was afraid drug dealers would be around the high school.

A second safety concern of the younger girls was personal safety. The girls talked about a fear of being hurt. One girl said, "I'm very scared, you know, about being raped . . . in colleges and stuff, and there's all these stories about being raped, and that's really scary." Another said, "I've always been scared of people coming in my house. I mean, I can sleep in the dark, but I wouldn't want to live alone." A third said, "I'd be scared to wake up in the morning and think that you could die or you could get raped or you could get AIDS or you could breathe the wrong kind of air and die."

Conclusions

Based on data gathered from both the questionnaire and focus group discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The younger girls had a clearer vision of what they wanted to be when they grew up than the older girls.
- The majority of girls, both younger and older, felt that their career aspirations were possible.
- Younger girls felt their career plans were possible because of an interest or ability in the field, a belief in themselves or through hard work and getting good grades in school.
- When asked whether their career plans were possible, the older girls, in contrast, responded most often by not answering the question or by saying that their plans would most likely be accomplished through hard work and good grades or through an ability in the field.
- Younger girls were more specific about future occupations; the older girls spoke more generally about future careers, describing general fields or job qualities instead of specific occupations.
- Few girls, younger or older, aspired to careers in sports or athletics. Those girls who imagined sports as a part of their future assumed their participation would diminish when they became adults.
- The majority of the girls, both older and younger, were optimistic about their future and had something to look forward to, both short- and long-term.
- Concerns about the future, for girls of both age groups, included financial stability, school, their parents' health and leaving their parents.

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- Despite concerns for the future, most girls were looking forward to having more freedom and responsibility as they grew older.
- The younger girls looked forward to being able to make their own decisions in the future, but the older girls spoke about looking forward to being heard or being listened to when they were older.
- Most of the girls, both younger and older, pictured themselves getting married in the future. The girls in both groups were very definite about whether they would or would not have children.
- The older girls worried about school, the future and having enough money in the future, failing and other people's expectations for and opinions about them. Many of the younger girls worried most about safety. ●

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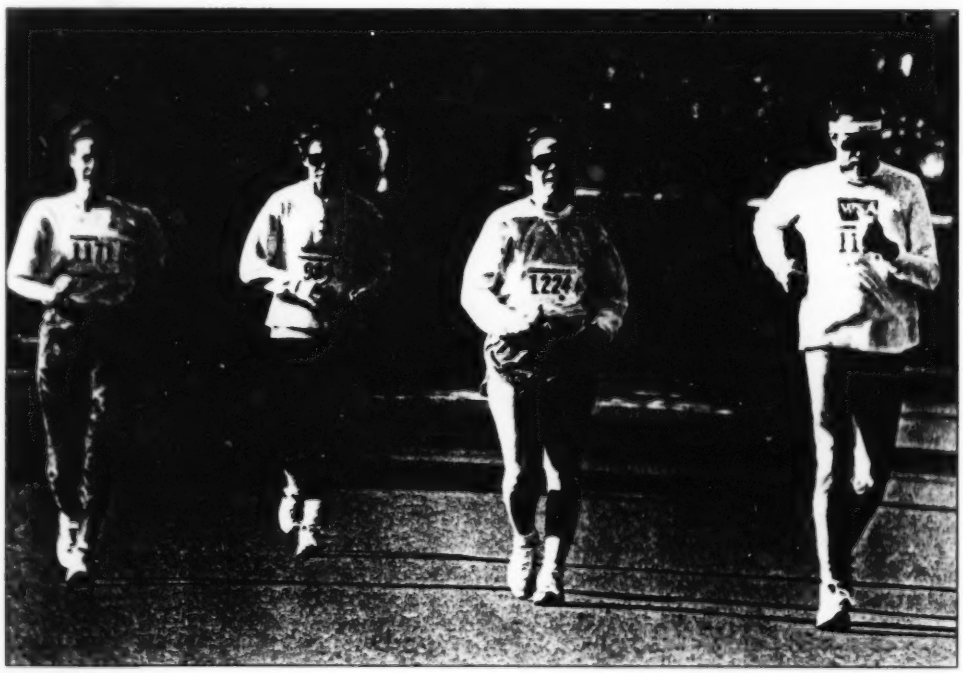

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1994 Melpomene race participants

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